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Preface
Roy Wagner's "Chess of kinship": An opening gambit

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Usually, the peer-review mechanism of a scholarly journal is designed to ensure that an article can stand for itself. In the unusual circumstances that the editors take the step of augmenting an author's piece of writing with a short foreword, this is often intended as either an introduction, an explanation or a justification of the piece – that is, to exert some controlling effect on the meaning of the article. This brief text intends nothing of the kind, and for best results should not be read that way. We offer up a few ideas, whose usefulness is restricted, only to provide an opening to that which follows, and which is sure to clear these away.

The publication of "The chess of kinship and the kinship of chess," a chapter from a new manuscript entitled, *The place of invention*, falls on the heels of a visit this summer (2011) to Brazil, where in addition to participating in a series of seminars and lectures, Roy Wagner also engaged in a symmetric anthropological exchange with indigenous shamans and leaders—such as Davi Kopenawa Yanomami and Mauricio Yekuana in Rio de Janeiro, and Iginio Tenorio Tuyuka in Manaus and in nearby communities. The shamans there on the Rio Negro initiated Wagner into their own form of knowledge-practices, including the psychoactive *kahpí*, which has its own capacities to spin initiates' heads, in ways not unlike the effects of Wagner's writing.

Although Wagner's "The Chess of Kinship" adopts what may appear to be an unconventional format and strategy for making its point – for example, readers looking for an introduction or conclusion will be disappointed – there are no missing pieces and there is no larger puzzle picture. Readers will soon realize that they provide a component piece and have to play their part. Neither kinship nor chess amount to, or provide, an "end point" for the argument, but rather the inter-relations set up the "means" by which the capacities of one can be depicted or figured through the other. Disconcertingly perhaps, many of the insights are created *with* the reader, and if unable to point to a point they will at least understand their own part in the pointing. That kinship is not a self-contained domain that can be modeled, but rather a set of relations which provide alternating views of what the relations, and the persons caught up in, or caused by them, can be made to do, is the simplistic point which provides the frame for the inter-actions here.

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The argument, much like the author's favorite chess move the Knight-Fork (the Knight being the only piece on the board that *must* end a move with a shift from white to black, or black to white), develops in one frame or register before using that position as a platform to jump to another frame or register. Both kinship and chess appear, and disappear, and – in the illustrations, data, references and asides in between – it is always clear that both are nonetheless present, and that each gets illuminated, or forked, by the other in turn. The artifice of using each to mediate and to think about the other is acknowledged and taken seriously as a method. Perhaps in more familiar language, we might say that form and content have been productively fused.

There are two methodological aspects here: the first concerns a refusal of any generalized relation between model and reality, the second concerns the fashioning of analysis after particular Melanesian knowledge-practices.

Rather than adopting a theoretical method to frame or access a domain of social life called "kinship" then, the inter-play in Wagner's article suggests an innovative method to get at what human kinship is all about. This point, and the language here, go back to David Schneider who might be said to have invented the "New Melanesian Ethnography" nearly fifty years ago—for in Joel Robbins' terms "there is no doubt that what makes the New Melanesian Ethnography distinctive as a way of doing ethnography is its insistence that theory be made out of materials that one finds in the same place one finds one's data" (2006: 172). In Marilyn Strathern's terms, the challenge for anthropology is to attempt to "imagine what an indigenous 'analysis' might look like if we took seriously the idea that these islanders might be endorsing their own theory of social action" (1992: 150). In other words, mid-twentieth century anthropology's scrupulous separation of theory and data has been methodically reformulated such that more weight is given to the theory of social action, of say, Papua New Guinea's Mount Hageners than, say, Philosophy's Martin Heidegger.

This insistence on finding, making and relying on theory derived from the same place as the ethnographic data, has also led to an important point here: the refashioning of anthropological analysis after Melanesian forms so as to demonstrate or convey their effect rather than merely trying to describe it. The method here seeks to go beyond the deployment of vernacular terms in formal or informal academic models, and so develop analyses on the terms and in the forms of Melanesian creativity. That is, not to deploy ethnographic content to illustrate forms of academic creativity as an end in itself (Wagner 1981), but to develop the revelatory capacities of Melanesian forms as a means to describe how local creativities (Melanesian and academic) differently exploit what, for talk's sake, could be said to be the (con)fusion between form and content.

Schneider's simplistic point was to frame anthropological "kinship" theorization as the projection of a hypothesis or model onto the materials under study – and the counterpart conceit of being taken in by, or muddled by, and then forgetting that the effect of a theory providing a measure of reality was self-induced. Schneider was puzzled why this turning back on itself did not appear as circularity in the argument. For Schneider, the British structure-functionalists and unilinear descent theorists of the 1940–50s had created a persuasive and powerful way of talking about kinship-theory which relied upon the device of making the theoretical figure or model and the ethnographic reality or ground appear to be the same thing—through the counterpart insistence that theory and data were clinically

isolated. The trick required the development of a specialized language in order for the knowledge to be effective by, so-to-speak, turning back on itself whilst eclipsing or concealing the artifice. It became obvious to Schneider that people on Yap had created their own tricks and language for talking about, and doing, what we might call "kinship" (cf. Bashkow 1991).

Schneider drew attention to the origin of ideas, to the means by which theory and data configure each other, and thus to theory sourced from the field and method sourced from relations. Wagner's development of this point came in the following terms:

> What we need is not a model of how symbols interact with "reality," but a model of how symbols interact with other symbols. And clearly, since a commitment to "reality" is so persistent and insidious among anthropologists as well as their subjects, such a model must account for the fact that some symbolic expressions are perceived as 'reality' whereas others are not (1978:21).

Schneider's pointed finger then, directed attention to what theory *does* rather than what theory *is* or thinks it is about. This simple idea could be said to have provided the opening move to the "New Melanesian Ethnography"—and yet also be responsible for the effect of how serious theoretical work can appear as a game whose proponents appear to be concerned with the ideal rather than the actuality (Josephides 1991). In the hands of Marilyn Strathern (1988), Hageners have taught anthropologists not to read "gender" from what something is (e.g. a woman or a man) but what something *does* (e.g. has an effect taken to be female or male, according to local idioms). Similarly, in Tony Crook's work, Angkaiyakmin articulate a theory of knowledge whereby "meaning" derives from the effects of what it does—and shows why anthropologists with their own ideas about knowledge should have had such a hard time trying to pin down meaning (2007). Read with familiar thinking in mind, such writings as these and "Chess of Kinship," can produce a disorientating experience, but one suggestive of an alternative to the muddle of models.

Roy Wagner got and developed Schneider's simplicity, and has been reworking the point ever since he received a copy of "Some muddles in the models" (1965, and reprinted in this volume) whilst he was in the field with the Daribi. *The Curse of Souw* (1967) turned descent and alliance theory inside-out, and contains a nascent symmetrical anthropology in equating and thus making the anthropologist's models analogous to Daribi's symbols (see also Corsín Jiménez this volume). This was developed through *Habu* (1972) and *The invention of culture* (1981), towards a fully-fledged "theory of symbolic obviation" in *Lethal speech* (1978). As for Schneider, kinship has been a consistent venue for Wagner's re-workings, and the underlying critique of "models" in the present piece is evident in "Are there groups in the New Guinea Highlands?" (1974), and "Analogic kinship" (1977) which pursued the obviational theory of life-cycle exchanges before it was laid out in *Symbols that stand for themselves* (1986).

Throughout this body of work, Wagner's moves in anthropology were perhaps less obviously a prolonged experiment with our own forms of knowledge modeled after Melanesian ones, but there can be no mistaking this in the work that has followed. At this point too, the mutual influence of other Melanesianist scholars, especially Jadran Mimica (*Intimations of infinity*, 1988), Marilyn Strathern (*The*

gender of the gift, 1988 and *Partial connections*, 2001), and James Weiner (*The heart of the pearlshell*, 1988) should not be under estimated. As Wagner writes in *An Anthropology of the Subject*: "The fieldworkers who retrieved the data on holographic perspectives in Melanesia were surprised by it, and often, as in my case, it took them years to figure out what they were looking at" (2001: xxi). In the 1990s, then, the "New Melanesian Ethnography" took an important turn through the influences of ethnographic materials appearing to be holographic, of fractal mathematics as an analytical metaphor, and of experiments in re-fashioning theory after Melanesian pragmatics.

Wagner himself claims (2011: 121) that what he latter termed "obviation" was originally taught to him by the Daribi, specifically his main myth informant, Yapenugiai, and in effect amounts to a kind of Daribi "language ideology" or theory of talk ("*po*" = "information," "language," "speech") recast in terms of symbols (Wagner 1978), one that makes explicit that talk has the capacity to posit its own figure and ground, including their reversal. This allowed Wagner to re-perceive anthropology itself as a kind of *po* or talk—a particular technique of "description" as Marilyn Strathern puts it (1999: xi–xii)—and to also re-position it outside the problematic social constructionist paradigm of "one nature, many cultures."

"The Chess of Kinship" deploys a kind of Melanesian "power talk" whose pragmatic effect is obviation or figure-ground reversal. The Daribi call it *porigi*, (*po begerama pusabo po*) "the talk that turns back on itself as it is spoken" (Wagner 2011: 122). Regarding their own forms of revelation, the Barok of New Ireland told Wagner that "When you realize the secret of the *pidik*, you stand not at the end but at the beginning of knowledge." The Foi call it "tree leaf talk" (*irisae-medobora*), "words that conceal their own base or grounds, as tree leaves hide from sight what goes on behind them" (Weiner 2001: 164). The Telefomin also employ the method of turning words and "spinning initiates heads" in order that their dizziness may eventually induce clear vision (Jorgensen 1990).

Wagner's recent work has revisited Schneider's questioning of models in anthropology, and argues that, rather than achieving some perfect equivalence between parts and whole, Melanesian analogics suggest that holography works precisely by resisting anything but an imperfect or scale-model of itself. And if this were not reminder enough for anthropologists to remember their contingent role in measuring their own models via the life-worlds of other peoples, Wagner has since opted to explore the insights and exploit the effectiveness of Melanesian knowledge-practices, and has developed a dialogic or "chiasmatic" basis to his exposition (2001, 2010). Initially, this can feel to a reader like a Castanedan apprenticeship or cultic instruction session, and that is rather Wagner's intent. But the incentive for the willing reader is that these Melanesian—or Mesoamerican—forms of exegesis might just pin down or knock the conventions of academic thought sufficiently off-balance to offer a future glimpse of human creativity and of an anthropological science game enough to match it.

Wagner's experiments in strategically deploying Melanesian informed techniques of anthropological writing constitute a kind of ethnographic theory whereby Melanesian forms and preoccupations are inflected within our own. Such controlled equivocations (Viveiros de Castro 2004) have inspired other variations of the Knight-Fork move elsewhere such as perspectivism—itself a figure-ground reversal of Euro-American multiculturalism—originally developed out of an

encounter with Amerindian forms of thought (Viveiros de Castro 1998), and also Symmetric Anthropology (Abaeté Manifesto).

In Brazil, Wagner also met with indigenous students at the Universidade Federal de Amazonas in Manaus, who are conducting their own "reverse anthropology" researches inspired by *The invention of culture*, which was recently translated and published in Portuguese (2010), using analogies drawn from Amerindian, rather than Euro-American thought. And so the experiment with anthropology continues. In the "Chess of Kinship," Wagner demonstrates and conveys one possible move in this game, a revelation or display of knowledge that requires a different kind of work and care on behalf of the reader whose involvement here is differently positioned and requires playing by different rules.

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The chess of kinship and the kinship of chess*

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Abstract: The real comparison between the anthropological study of kinship and the game of chess is not immediately apparent from their formal properties, and only becomes relevant when they are viewed as strategies, or patterns of events occurring in time. The single "proportion" that both share in common is a kind of cross-comparison between dualistic variables called a chiasmus, illustrated in kinship by the classic cross-cousin relationship, and in chess by the asymmetric double-proportion between the king and queen, the only gendered pieces on the board, and the moves and tokens of the other pieces in the game. The difference may be summed up in the word "mating." Chess may be described as the "kinship" of kinship. Failure to understand the chiasmatic, or double-proportional essence of both has resulted in many dysfunctional models of cross-cousin marriage, and many very quick games of chess.

Keywords: Kinship, chess, humour, knowledge practices, cross-cousin marriage, strange attractor, Melanesia

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The standard anthropological representation of "kinship," first presented by Lewis Henry Morgan in 1871, was a static pattern, useful for strictly *comparative* purposes, and it set the discipline on a *self-inertial* or "structural functional" trajectory, in which *pattern*, *consistency* and especially *relativity* became key points of reference. As such it stood in sharp contrast to the way in which human lives are actually lived and thought upon, the patterning of *events* and the design of *strategies*. Both the *field* of *play* and the *cast of players* are part of the overall design, an arbitrary framework for the working out of fortunes.

In kinship you mate at the beginning of the game, in chess you mate at the end. The word "mate" has a very different etymology in each case, and a very different

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meaning, but it is the same sound used in much the same way, and it is very strategic.

In chess you start out with all your personnel there at once, ranked and ordered in a very specific way, and with some exceptions you proceed to diminish their numbers as the game progresses. In kinship you start out conceptually with very few personnel, and proceed to multiply their numbers as time progresses. Then you proceed to rank and order them according to very specific categories—generally genealogies and lineages rather than knight, bishop, rook, and pawn. (You can always get more pawns at a pawnshop.)

In chess there is a single strategy, known only to the game itself, and each player tries to figure out what it is. When one of them gets it—it gets the other one. In kinship there are a great many potential strategies, but everyone, including the anthropologist, thinks they know the one that counts. Or at least pretends to, because you don't want the other players to *see* your cards, and most of them are bluffing in any case. And the one who dies with the most strategies, wins.

Chess is a very high profile intellectual game, but in the end it is not really intellectual at all—more of a Jedi mind-trick, or like the role of a *grafter*—the kind of con-man who preys on other con-men in Redford and Newman's movie *The sting*. The grifter holds the middle ground between kinship and chess, and that middle ground is called *strategy. Whose* strategy? That's it, you just got it in one! Kinship and chess are parallel worlds, defining highly specific social, cultural, and physical contexts, which are only slightly overlapping. Nonetheless, there is at least one way in which they are one and the same thing.

And, though "strategy" pretty much covers it—this being the main reason anyone bothers with kinship, apart from sterile classificatory games, and the main reason anyone bothers with chess, apart from of course *winning*—let us go on. Of course, nobody ever bothers about winning and losing in kinship, no sirree! Just a few highly disreputable individuals, some of them called "men" and others "women." Oh, and I almost forget, "children."

There are many things about kinship that are not true of chess, and many things about chess that are not true of kinship. But there is one thing about both that most compels us, a thing that makes comparisons paradoxical, and paradoxes therefore comparative. This is the *chiasmatic*, or double-proportional comparison, the thing that Tony Crook (1997), who discovered it at Bolivip, Papua New Guinea, while decrypting the secretive "Mother House" complex, calls "changing the subject in mid-sentence"—a sort of syntactical "cross-cousin marriage" if the comparison be allowed. The Daribi people, also of Papua New Guinea, call it *porigi*, and describe it as *po begerama pusabo po* in their language, "the talk that turns back on itself as it is spoken." When asked: "What makes a man a big-man, is it having a lot of wives, or pigs?" Daribi will respond: "A man who can talk *porigi* effectively gets all the wives and pigs he wants."

Before I go on to demonstrate the pivotal role that chiasmus plays in both chess and kinship, it might be helpful to understand just exactly what kind of *strategy* it involves. For example, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus made his reputation by uttering cryptic statements like: "We live the gods' deaths and they live ours." Does this mean that Heraclitus knew some secrets about human beings and gods, or their strange relations, that others did not know? Hardly, Heraclitus was as entirely innocent of this kind of knowledge as you or I; he just knew how to use the *ergative* well, and use it in a chiasmatic strategy. An ergative expression is

one in which a conventionally *active* action or verb is displaced into a *passive* role, with an exponential gain in *power* and emphasis. Note that "living someone else's death" is an exemplary ergative of this sort, rather like "dying on the job" in a worker's paradise, and, when used chiasmatically in a double proportional comparison, it conjures a powerful ironic effect, as in the late Soviet joke: "We pretend to work, and the State pretends to pay us."

In other words the best way to keep--or even *invent*—a secret is to make it a function of the form (like the *porigi*) rather than the content. In this way the *formal* strategy shared between chess and kinship is more like a *coup* in topology and mathematics than it resembles the "relational" or emotional gambits favored by so-called "humanists." Let me illustrate: stated both *symmetrically* and *asymmetrically* at once (in the way that Heraclitus configured his prophetic utterances), the secret that there is no secret becomes a sort of half-truth about itself, and therefore a double- truth about anything else--more or less what the fractal mathematicians call a "*strange attractor*."[2] (The Elders of the Mother House at Telefolip, P.N.G., actually use this device as a major teaching strategy for their initiates (cf. Jorgensen 1981), and in 2000 Mike Wesch and I caught one of them in the act of trying to use it--called in that case "The Two Dolls"—on us).[3]

So there is a problem with this double-jeapardy illusionism after all; what did the Elder do to Mike and I that he had not already done to himself? Did the strange attractor called The Two Dolls not control *him* as well? And how did his self-conceit in this way differ from that of the grifter, the sleight-of-hand magician, the chess grandmaster, or for that matter the kinship-expert? It was just a way of talking, to be sure, but then Freud called his psychoanalysis "the talking cure." And the game of chess is likewise said to be very *educative*.

Where do we find the double-proportional chiasmus in the chess game? The layout of chess *is* a study in contrastive symmetries; there are two *sides* (or players), white and black squares (8 x 8) arranged in a totally symmetrical format, and each player begins with a symmetrical layout of pieces (bishops, knights, rooks, and pawns, traditionally called "men," but not explicitly gendered). These are the "four arms," priesthood, cavalry, fortification, and infantry, in the military regimen of ancient India, where the game originated.

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2 The conceptual device described in James Gleick's *Chaos: the making of a new science* (1987) as a strange attractor is an allegedly causitive function that is neither predictable nor unpredictable, and neither random or ordered, but highly sensitive to the *event* of its happening at a particular time and place. A good example of what happens when ordinary scientific fantasies turn into fractal (mathematical) *realities*.

3 The ontological premise (e.g. thought experiment) of "The Two Dolls" may be regarded as the final spinoff-product of the Mother House complex at Telefolip, Papua New Guinea. It is based on a paradox involve the original of something (the Creatress Afek, who created both nature and culture at the beginning of things), and the perfect copy of that original that may not be distinguished from it in any way Afek's nemesis Boben, who later performed all the miracles of Afek and made all of her journeys but "only to claim credit for what Afek had done." The point of the exercise is to force one to conclude that if there is no difference between the two, no difference may be known to exist.

And then there is the *other* proportion, and that is the one dictated by the only *explictly* gendered pieces on the board, which, according to the rules, must *face* each other across the board—an *asymmetry*—with the white square on the *right* of the player chosen by that color. These are the Queen and King, the most important elements in play, the ones that have their traditional courtly roles *reversed* (part of the same asymmetry). Normally, in real life, it is the *Queen* that holds the social positioning of the realm, whereas the *King* "kicks ass" and is the commander-in-chief. But in chess these roles are reversed; the queen is the most effective warrior of all, and the King, *by position*, holds the value of the game.

A strange attractor, called "The Two Dolls," for in fact it energizes (e.g. *ergatizes*) the game and makes it much more than a mere game, turns it into a *metaphor* of royal statecraft. In strategy, that is, the two *royals* are played against each other *in counterpoint* to the maneuvers of the two "armies." Basically, it is all about *mating*. Check it out.

Like two Barbie-dolls, each trying to out-Barbie the other. One is tempted to say we have the same contradistinction in kinship, between the so-called genealogical framework that ranks and orders the scheme as a whole, and the interplay of *affinal* kin, those related ("by alliance") through explicit gender-interaction. But that is deceptive in that genealogy is as much a function of gendered interaction as affinity, having the same source, and affinity is as much a function of genealogy as it is of marriage. Hence "descent theory" and "alliance theory" are, as the Norse say, "two horns on the head of the same goat," and it is not a doubly proportioned one. The key to the chiasmus was given by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The elementary structures of kinship.*

We might well do a little proportion-shifting of our own and call it "The elementary kinship of structures," so well did it turn the tables and advance a *positive* or *proactive* approach to the subject. To complete the *atom of kinship,* according to Lévi-Strauss, the *negative marriage rule* configured by Morganian genealogical reckoning must be counterbalanced by some explicitly stated *positive* counterpart, a known kin strategy for countering the distributional scattering of the generations. Just as there is an *incest* taboo, so must there be an *outcest* taboo; marrying *in*, consolidating one's lineal gains, is just as important as marrying *out*, regardless of other considerations.

So far so good, for we have a double-proportional counterpart to the rank-and-order versus gendered role-reversal schema found in chess, in that the face-to-face gendered relation of man and wife is counterparted, in Lévi-Strauss's "atom of kinship" schema, by the "strange attractor"—the "back-to-back" kinship engendered by the man's sister and the wife's brother and their respective progeny—the so-called "cross cousins" in the standard kinship repertoire.

The explicit proviso of Lévi-Strauss's "cross-cousin" argument, that "the mother might just as well have been somebody's father, and the father might just as well have been somebody's mother," was made, at different times and in different contexts, by Radcliffe-Brown (1940) and by my Barok congenors in New Ireland, each unaware of the other's existence. It suggests an imaginal counterplay of purely metaphorical reproduction going on behind the scenes of Morganian kin protocols—like the metaphoric intrigues of the King and Queen in chess vis à vis the straightforward maneuvering of their "armies."

Thus the actual *marriage* of cross-cousins, however classificatory, is an "easy answer" to, and a quick fix for, the dilemma posed in Lévi-Strauss's argument,

something of an overcommitment to the premise. A kin relation motivated by a strange attractor has no more a certain or predictable structural outcome than a gambit in chess. Both are stochastic, determined as much by their own presence as by the other factors in play. The Daribi, who call their cross cousins *hai'*, say that they are "exactly the same as siblings," but with an important difference. Since they belong to different wealth-sharing groups, male hai' must exchange continual payments of wealth to redeem the leviratic claims they share in the inheritance of each others's wives.

I found only one instance of real cross-cousin marriage at Karimui; this was at Hagani, a place where I resided. A man of Sora' pressed his claims to an unwed Hagani woman. He would hang around outside the longhouse for days crying:

"She is *my* cross-cousin, why can't I marry her?"

"Finally we got so tired of this we just let him have her."

"Aren't you supposed to beat them both up and give them a stiff lecture about how they are *bad people*?"

"Well, sure, *ideally*; but by that time our relations with Sora' had gotten so dicey we just decided to give it up."

Among the "matrilineal" Usen Barak of New Ireland the situation is more complicated; they call this kind of marriage "marriage with the *tau* (real father's real sister) or *gogup* (cross cousin)." Residents of the two northern villages, a subdialect group, put it this way: "The ancestors would never have tolerated anything but strict adherence to the rule of marriage with the tau or *gogup*; with the erosion of moral values in modern times, however, there is much laxness, particularly among the three southern villages."

Among the three southern villages, another subdialect group and the one where I resided, they countered: "The ancestors would never have tolerated anything so incestuous as marriage with the tau or *gogup*; now that moral standards have relaxed, however, the people of Belik and Lulubo are free to follow their base desires. This is particularly true of the hamlet of Lulubo called "Giligin," where *everybody* marries their *tau* or *gogup*."

Since I had some good friends at "Giligin's Island," as I called it, I decided to check things out. Fortunately one of them was not only fluent in the English language, but also *literate*; with his help I collected the complete genealogical record of Giligin to a depth of five generations, and examined each of the marriages carefully. Even making allowance for the so-called "classificatory" or categorial kin reckoning, I could find no instance of marriage - with the *tau* or *gogup* in the whole set. When I finished I said to my confrere: "Now I can see that every single marriage at Giligin has been with the *tau* or *gogup*." "Yes," he replied, beaming; "as I told you, we here at Giligin are a strictly moral people."

Speaking of strange attractors, the only instance of direct cross-cousin marriage that I found in the whole Usen area was in my own village of residence, Bakan, in the area that categorically denied the practice, and it involved one of my best friends, the man who lived in the house next to mine. When I asked him to account for it, he said "It was a matter of pure chance, I had nothing to do with it." Then, straightening himself up to his full height, which was cotsiderable, he explained: "I am known as one of the most moral men in this whole area."

Chess is a game in which there is a single dyad, that of the two players, who take turns in making moves, assuming the roles of one of six optational and function-

specific pieces, like occupational assignments in a military caste-system. Kinship is not a game, it is life for those caught up in it, and serious work for those who study it. Another big difference is that in kinship, although ideally arranged in dyads, each participant is involved in a great many different relationships at all times. And although that involvement is simultaneous, from the moment of birth and before, the kin participant must learn to differentiate what amounts to a single, diffuse, and all encompassing mode of *relating*, and *adapt* their action to the specifics of each culturally determined relationship role. There is no direct analogue to that in chess, which is by contrast *digital* in the play-mode. Both Radcliffe-Brown and Bateson have pointed out that the adaptation of *relating* in kinship is limited to *three* generic modes of analogic imitation, each one of them a variation on the single theme of relating appropriately. There are 1) *respect* (deferential) relationships, like those of worship, in which the obligations between junior and senior are conspicuously *exaggerated*; 2) *avoidance* relationships, in which the pointed *avoidance* or absence of interaction between the parties constitutes the substance of the relationship itself, and 3) *joking* relationships, in which the performance of inappropriate behavior, speech, or both offers the alter the option of either acceptance or rejection, and therefore affirmation or denial of the proferred bonding. These three modalities divide the play of kin roles among them, and the necessity of differentiating among them is one of the first things a child learns.

Joking, the pretended unseriousness of relating as opposed to the feigned overseriousness of respect or deference, brings us to the vexed question of the overall or long-term purpose or design of kinship. Answering it is no easy objective (*questioning* it is worse), for it is neither structural nor functional, and it is no surprise to find that it hinges on the very same double-proportional paradox--the strange attractor--that bedevils its entanglement in everyday affairs. Kinship is "connections established among the living on behalf of the dead" and at the same time "connections among the dead made on behalf of the living," (Wagner 2001: 104) and thus neither "life" nor "death" is going to supply us with any but a dismissive answer. "In a riddle whose answer is 'chess'," wrote Jorge Luis Borges, "what is the only prohibited word?" (Borges [1941] 1998: 126)

Instead of the solution, in other words, we might as well start guessing at what the *riddle* itself might be. Nor is the riddle an easy one, though one is reminded of the closing lines of a sonnet written by Edna Saint Vincent Millay (1934) about the ancient Egyptians:

> Their will was law, their will was not to die.
> And so they had their way; or nearly so.

Still, we get some clues from the work of Richard Huntington among the Bara of Madagascar, and from that of Gregory Bateson among the Iatmul of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. Death, for the Bara, is a matter of the *crystallization* of life's statuses and relationships--the very fact or matter of death *threatens* the living with a kind of "deep freeze" peril, a contagious absorption of life's spontaneity into an ageless matrix of crystalline perfection. ("The *perfect*," as the saying goes, "is the enemy of the good.") Faced with the presence of death, the Bara conventionally do everything possible to reassert the spark of life; they stampede the cattle through the village, create havoc, drink themselves silly on rum, and the nubile teenagers gather in groups in the forest, chant obscene songs to one

another, and couple promiscuously. Had Millay written a sonnet about the Bara practices, she might have called them "death warmed over."

Nonetheless, what the Bara have to tell us about kin relationships has little to do with humor, seriousness, or abject avoidance; faced with the desolation of mortality and what we have learned to call "survivor's guilt," they *pretend*--pretend with (real) violence, hilarity, alcoholic rush, and the sublime ecstasy of ("Oh, my mama should see me now") *illegitimate intercourse* ("Burgundy adultery," as a friend of mine used to call it--a good name for a starship).

And that is one of the keys--the "might have been" or "philosophy of as if"—to the riddle we are supposed to be concerned with; there is no kin *relationship* on *earth* that is not to some *degree* a *matter* of *pretending* (though in chess it is all dead *serious),* a subtle art that every child learns at an early age. There is no such thing as *non-fictive kinship;* when the pretense breaks down, so does the kinship, and we have something of an *iron law of kinship: real kinship is not the thing that is going on in any pretext that might otherwise be confused with kin relationships.*

Nor is death itself the thing one thought it was going to be, and this is the lesson taught in Gregory Bateson's *Naven.* Though it is a countereffect of the integral *duality* of Iatmul life, something that Bateson singled out and called *schismogenesis*, the Iatmul honorific mortuary rite is a case in point of *obviation.* This is a highly counterintuitive alternative to the usual sense of completion or consummation of a human life, a *positive negation*, in which the end result is neither the subject ("life") nor its antithesis ("death"). The *obviate* human being ("*Tod und Verklärung,*" "Death and Transfiguration" as Richard Strauss called it) is neither living nor dead.

In Bateson's account, all the symbolic accoutrements of the deceased's life and achievements are assembled together in the form of a token human figure, an effigy representing the deceased. This figure was set up by members of the initiatory moiety of which the deceased was a member. It was a boast of the greatness of their moiety. And when the figure was completed all the men of both moieties crowded round it. The members of the opposite moiety came forward one by one to claim equivalent feats. One man said: "I have a wound here on my hip, where (the people of) Kararau speared me. I take that spear," and took the spear set against the figure's hip. Another said: "I killed so-and-so. I take that spear," and so on till all the emblems of prowess had been removed (Bateson 1958: 155). The ritual Iatmul mortuary practices not only answer the riddle of life-in death and death-in-life; they *obviate* it. Obviation is the *destiny* of symbols, as natural to them as death is to human beings. The word "obviate" means not only "to render *obvious* that which was heretofore obscure," but also, according to its dictionary definition, "to anticipate and dispose of." *To anticipate death in life is to dispose of life in death.* As to Bateson's role in this, as the *anthropologist*, one might well conclude that "the historian *tells* the story, the literature *interprets* the story, but the anthropologist *obviates* the story," renders it innocuous as though it had never been in the first place. Kinship is obviated not in the way we understand it, but in the way that it *understands us.* Though "underdetermine" might be a better word than "understand," as in Millay's sonnet.

This puts a whole new spin on our subject, for we have nothing in our whole epistemological repertoire to suggest that something as inert and abstract as "kinship" might have powers of comprehension at all, nor that anyone might, as Ingmar Bergman has it in the movie *The Seventh Seal,* "play chess with death"

(*shakspielen med do□ den*)--though that is just exactly what the Iatmul do in their mortuary rite. The Iatmul are "understood" so well in that rite that they have nothing left to live for, or even *die* for. More generally, insofar as kinship is concerned, not only are our very thought-patterns embodied in the *things* we think about (events, circumstances, objects), but they also run the danger of being "understood" either too well or not well enough by our parents--the closest one can come to *kinship incarnate*--and thus growing up absurd. (A *real* anthropologist's offspring always run some danger of growing up absurd--but then, consider the *source*.)

Moreover, it is just precisely this inversion of subject and object, the ergative, or strange attractor, that we have seen to bring both chess and kinship "out of the woodwork" and into the world of lived reality, especially when one considers not simply what *constitutes* them, but what *empowers* them.

Metaphors talk, to *you*; they have *agency*, and minds of their own (though admittedly a tad bit schizophrenic). Chess makes your hands move with a patience and skill that not even a lover would tolerate. As for the chess pieces themselves: "it is not the hand of God that moves us, but the *god of hand*." The kinship that "understands" one better than one can understand it and the chess that compels the player into "unnatural" moods of intense concentration are parts of an encompassing double-proportional "feedback loop" that extends far beyond the limits of "bush sociology" and grandmaster tournaments. It is one that involves the meaningful properties of language as well—the ways in which language *relates to itself* as well as the ways in which the *speakers* of *language* relate to one another—and that intertwining is as much a part of our heritage as the double-helical infrastructure of DNA.

There has always been an unspoken assumption among students of kinship that their subject is *somehow* related to the need for human solidarity—families, bonds, groups, and that sort of thing. And although that is admittedly a "functionalist" idea, somehow related to the admittedly "structuralist" notion that metaphor or trope is the font and sole purveyor of meaning in language, the connections necessary to bring these two together extend beyond the limits of disciplinary boundaftes and require "thinking outside of the box."

So we might as well start from scratch. We have never found a human assemblage that did not possess both a spoken language and a mode of relating expressed through kin terminology. Thus we can conclude that both of these are somehow necessary to the existence and composition of the species Homo sapiens, the species, be it noted, that was responsible for the concept of *species* in the first place. (We are the great *classifiers* of the world, and we *classify* ourselves as such.)

But *meaning* is the "wild card," so to speak--a "box" that must necessarily think outside of itself—re-classify itself beyond the ability to classify what it is doing in the process of doing so. *No one can say* just exactly what a novel or innovative metaphor—a re-invention of language as it were- -means, until or unless it has become "tired" and has *classified* itself among the familiar and conventional *signifiers* that make up the lexical properties of language.

That is a very long-winded way of putting it, and it has been said many times before. But the long and short of it is that trope or metaphor is always brought into being by making unlikely and unconventional cross- connections in the lexicon--creating an *identity* between two unlikely parts of language, just as a novel strategy

in chess evolves by making unlikely combinations of pieces and moves (a knight-fork, for instance—one of my favorites, along with, of course Burgundy adultery). To put it succinctly, *metaphor is the mating and meaning strategy of language,* the necessary way in which language *relates to itself*. Likewise, *kin terminology*, the necessary reference-coding of kin relationship (without which it would not know itself for what it pretends to be) is the way in which speakers of language relate to one another. Both are part and parcel of the *reproduction of language* through its speakers, and the *reproduction of the speakers themselves* by means of language.

One of Gregory Bateson's best and most famous adages was "one cannot not relate." That is undeniably true, but unfortunately it leads to the fallacy of assuming the reality of naive or spontaneous "relationships," a kind of collateral damage left over from the "psychiatry" era of the 1970's, when one could actually get money from the government for pretending that sort of thing. Even for chess players, the need for face-to-face relationships has been subverted by the Internet. *Relating*, which means "putting the sides together," is both basic and essential, and defines the human condition both on and off the chess board. There is a big difference here. Shall we psychoanalyze the knight to find out what it "feels like" to move two squares over and one to the side? I don't think so.

Chess throws that much-abused term, "relationship" into high relief. Seen from the top, the knight's potential moves describe an octagon, but unfortunately a *real* knight can only access one of these positions at a time. The bishop's moves describe an angular lattice, the rook's a Cartesian coordinate system, but only the board itself describes all of these at once. It is not necessarily the foursquare (actually 8 x 8) two dimensional Aubix cube puzzle it appears to be, for it is equally conceivable on a diagonal format, and can also be visualized as a series of internested knightly octagons. Each player, or "side," faces a mirror-perspective of their strategic layout, "consults" the chess-relational mirror, with the singular exception of the two gendered pieces**,** the Queen and King.

There are no easy answers to the question of why human beings consult mirrors in any case; perhaps it is nature's very own form of counterintelligence. For the one you see in the mirror *has* both sides reversed, as well as front and back, and no one else will ever see you that way. That has distinct advantages in mating of course, in both senses of the term, and all things considered it is the chess view of yourself: "move and mate in two." (I check myself in the mirror before I go out, and so does my date; and though the date itself may come to nothing, the two of them have a great time together—almost as if they were playing a game.) But who are this mysterious them that just stole our evening from us? Let us continue.

The real difference between one "side" and the other, or between the game and reality, comes with the realignment of *gender* with respect to *laterality*. Normally in the game of life an individual has only one *gender* and two *sides*, a right and a left. In chess, however, each player plays only one side**,** but has two genders, a King and a Queen, one on the left and the other on the right. In the context of the game, as opposed to real life, the players are not really human beings at all, but are playing the roles of what I have called the *Antitwins* (Wagner 2001, Ch. 4), a cross-purposed subvariant of the human form that is somehow necessary to our existence. They do all the things we cannot, and we do all the things they cannot (They throw *our* dice, we throw theirs, cf. Wagner 2001, Ch. 4), or, in the words of the Mary Tyler Moore theme song, they "can take a nothing date and make it seem worthwhile."

Normally there is no such thing as *proof* in chess; there are rules, gambits, and plenty of *execution*. (Imagine Robespierre trying to substitute a piece called "The Guillotine" for the King and Queen.) But the proof of the Antitwins in chess is that the King and Queen have exchanged their normative roles—the Queen has taken on the role normally attributed to the King in real life: making cool moves and working strategy, and the king exercises the right of *position* and *social status*—for the king by position holds the value of the game itself.

The game of chess, of course, has nothing to do with human matings, power-plays, or domestic arrangements, for even in its own fantasy world it belongs to the top of the political food-chain. Full of the imagery of royal houses and their power-plays, it is all about *power*, and what must be done to safeguard power while controlling the moves of others. Kinship, of course, is nothing like that...or is it? By the time it becomes an anthropological object of study it is already an almost mathematical abstraction, a generator of events that your average kinsperson would scarcely recognize ("Who, me? A cross-cousin? Not on *your* life. Ah'm a *kissin' cousin*; jes ask my Mama, Auntie-Twin"). Even so, like even the most mundane domestic crisis, it trades on the profit margin of *control* and credibility. *Thinking* about it, our usual reaction to a generator of events has almost nothing to do with what it is and how it works. The twelfth century Japanese sage Dogen wrote: "What is happening here and now is obstructed by happening itself; it has sprung free from the brains of happening" (Dogen 2008: 7).

One morning in 1989 I was busy with what I thought was a huge discovery at the time: that incest *is* not the tabooed object or form of misbehavior we had thought it was, the *opposite* of kinship, but rather its perfect *appositive*. It is the formless *content* of all kin relations as against the contentless *form* of the way they have been described and studied. Transported, I began to sketch out the first group portrait of the Antitwins, which I labeled "the twincest," "the icon of incest," and "the mirror-gender symmetries."

But time really flies when you're having fun, and I realized I had forgotten to check my mail that morning. When I did I found a draft copy of Jadran Mimica's "The incest passions" (Mimica 1991a; 1991b), the best and by far the most articulate study yet conceived on the subject of incest as a sui generis phenomenality. But that discovery, *as* Mimica was well aware, is beside the point that the actual, regular, and even compulsive *practice* of downright incestuous relations in all modern societies, within the closest familial relationships, exceeds all reasonable expectations. To understand what this means and why it continues, especially among highly educated people in modern industrial societies, one would need not only an incest taboo but an outcest taboo as well. And if that outcest taboo worked just as poorly as the (barely understood) incest taboo seems to, then all the rationalizations or irrationalizations made to support it would likewise go for nothing, for *thinking* is not what family behavior is all about. *Control* is what it is all about.

Kinship, like history, natural process, and the strategy of the machine, presupposes a logic of consequentiality, or cause and effect, in the happening of things. Relationship, however, betokens something altogether different, more like the antilogic of *irony*, wherein one is given the *effect* first, as in the opening scenario or "setup" of a joke, and then surprised with the unlikely causality of the punchline. Even to put it this way, though, is something of a singularity, or joke on itself, for jokes and relationships—basically monkey wrenches thrown into the

machineries of thought—do not fall into a consistency of thinking things backwards (as though one had discovered the perfect system for nonsystematic thinking), but *carry* an inherent disqualification in the strategy of their telling or working out. They celebrate the *uncanny.*

It is unlikely from this point of view that relationships, as well as the incest and outcest they depend on, ever had *a* beginning--one might as well search for the origin of the joke (cf. Wagner 2001: Chap. "The Story of Eve"), Relationships first came into focus later on as "kinship" when the cause-and-effect rationalizations were developed to turn them into lines of descent, genealogies, affinal relations, and so forth, for what good are relatives with nothing to relate? It is not only difficult but wellnigh impossible for an anthropologist to imagine what mating was like among a so-called *precultural* people without immediately thinking of "marriage," if only to project a pattern that might conveniently be negated by an anti-term such as *nonmarriage*. Inevitably, this leads the prehistorian, otherwise a sound and sane individual, to project one of those classic "natural man" strategies: "Before human beings as we know them had evolved the people coupled with one another through a primitive system that might be called "nonmarriage," had *inconceivable* offspring through a form of what we now know as *dissemination*, which left everybody feeling empty and rootless. It is only now, on hindsight, that we can trace out their movements in the mud, using flint chips and stone tools that hardly scratch the surface."

Chess, of course, is purely "symbolic" (tell this to a grandmaster, and then *duck*), but the model of kinship I have been reviewing here is something more than that. It has no necessary origin or point of termination, if only for the fact that its meanings and its relationships, as I have shown, are spun mutually and retroactively out of the same generative matrix, which I have termed a *strange attractor* or *double-proportional chiasmus*. This would have to include as well the incest taboo and its *outcest* variant, the arbitrary "rule because there have to be rules" upon which Lévi-Strauss predicated the whole incest-cum-reciprocity argument of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. But we have seen that proscriptions and reciprocities of this type produce *both* the prohibition and the thing prohibited (the *practice* of incest as well as its prohibition) out of the same central motif, and with the same generous facility with which the Daribi both affirm and deny the "siblingship" of cross-cousins, and the Barak both inadvertantly practice and proscribe direct cross-cousin marriage with commendable moral ardour and self-contradictory results in each case. Of course, when dealing with a strange attractor the traditional *exception that proves the rule* turns very quickly into the *rule that proves the exception,* so of course there must be people ("somewhere") that follow the rule of direct cross-cousin marriage just exactly as Lévi-Strauss had predicted. In 1964 I spent a few days with just such a people, the Yagaria speakers of Lagaiu Village in the eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea. Very thoroughly, in consultation with a group of elders, I managed to elicit their kin terminology, correlate it exhaustively with the genealogical record, and determine that they married according to a very strict regimen of *bilateral* cross-cousin *marriage* (they called the category of marriageable lines *devo'a*). Though I did not stick around long enough to see how the "system" worked in practice, I'll bet it did, for I found them to be very sharp *rationalizers*.

Where else in science can one find such piquant irrelevancies? Our hero Gregory Bateson developed the *double-bind* theory of schizophrenia out of the

double-proportional *schismogenesis* model he had discovered in his work among the Iatmul. Although it remained in vogue among psychiatrists for only a very short time and soon lost ground to other, more "clinically correct" therapies, it *imitated* schizophrenic symptoms like nothing else in the world (no one has ever managed to *cure* schizophrenia, or cross cousin marriage either). Often the best we can do is *imitate*. It is rumored, for instance, that our solar system (the sun, with its attendant satellitic bodies) developed by gravitic accretion out of a primordial disc shaped nebular cloud. In that case *gravity* would be the *primum mobile*, and most of the gravity in the solar system is invested in the sun itself. But wait a minute, there *is* another proportion to this schismogenesis, for most of the *angular momentum* (gravity's necessary counterforce) in the system is invested in the planets, satellites, asteroids, and even the tenuous Oort cloud. Hence another "origin" for the whole is a distinct possibility, which is that the sun once had a companion star located in the orbital vicinity of Jupiter, one whose explosion redistributed the system's angular momentum into the pattern we find today. Since neither hypothesis precludes the other, the question of which is the "correct" one is as trivial as that of how exactly the cross-cousin relation ought to be formulated, and as inconclusive, both being predicated on a *strange attractor*. The problem with thinking things this way, and of the strange attractor, if I may make so bold, is one of *self-absorption* and acute *self-involvement*; it is just simply that a system formulated in this way lacks the ability to *step outside of itself and see itself for what it is.*

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Les échecs de la parenté et la parenté des échecs

Résumé : La vraie comparaison entre une étude anthropologique sur la parenté et le jeu d'échec n'apparait pas à première vue en en restant à leurs propriétés formelles. Elle ne fait sens que lorsqu'on les regarde en tant que stratégies, ou modèles d'événements inscrit dans une temporalité. La simple « proportion » que les deux ont en commun est une forme de comparaison croisée entre des variables dichotomiques que l'on désigne sous le terme de chiasme, illustrée pour la parenté par la relation classique entre cousins croisés, et pour les échecs par la double proportion asymétrique entre le roi et la reine — les deux seules pièces du plateau qui ont un genre — ainsi que par les déplacements et figures des autres pièces du jeu. La différence pourrait être récapitulée dans le mot « coupler ». Les échecs pourraient être ainsi décrits comme la « parenté » de la parenté. L'incapacité à saisir ce chiasme, ou l'essence de double-proportionnalité des deux pourrait être à l'origine de nombre de modèles dysfonctionnels de mariages entre cousins croisés, comme à de nombreuses parties d'échecs très vite terminées.

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